

Council to mull ways of appointing Deputy Mayor under ward system

This fall's municipal election in Aurora will be very different compared to years past.

Instead of voting for a Mayor and up to six Council candidates to represent the community as a whole, residents will be able to cast a single vote for Mayor and one Council candidate to represent one of six neighbourhoods or wards.

Aurora isn't reinventing the wheel by ditching the present at-large Council composition; in fact, it's the last York Region municipality to do so. But one key detail of the new ward system is yet to be ironed out: how the position of Deputy Mayor will be filled.

The position of Deputy Mayor is traditionally given to the highest vote getter in the Council stakes. As Harold Kim topped the Council vote Aurora-wide in 2018, he assumed the Deputy Mayor position in the 2018-2022 term of Council.

The new ward system will change the game and Council could decide as early as next month how Council's second-in-command will be chosen.

This question was recently raised by Councillor Rachel Gilliland who requested the Municipal Clerk bring forward a report with a list of options Council might pick. As potential candidates can begin registering their intentions to run beginning May 1, it is an issue that needs to be figured out sooner rather than later, she said.

"Maybe the ball was dropped, but I feel we need to get the ball moving on this so we have an idea of what to expect," she said.

A motion to bring forward that report was seconded by Councillor John Gallo who said he also had questions on how the Deputy Mayor position would be filled.

"Because we're entering into a ward system, I get that everything is going to be divided up [but] right now it is whoever gets the most votes out of the six so it would be different," he said.

It is a question that Mayor Tom Mrakas said he had been mulling as well and after speaking with representatives from other communities who have adopted a ward system, he said he's heard a variety of methods put forward.

"[In some areas], if you have a Regional Councillor that is basically run as a Deputy Mayor," said Mayor Mrakas who, as Aurora has only one seat at the Regional table, serves as Aurora's lone voice at Regional Council. "Others who don't have Regional Councillors, they possibly rotate [the Deputy Mayor position]. It is just that we rotate who chairs the meetings. Realistically, it is more of a symbolic title; it is not necessarily an elected title that you get elected with."

"Our bylaw states that it is the Councillor who receives the highest number of votes. That would be very difficult to equate in a ward system due to the fact if one ward has 16 people running or another ward has two people running, it is impossible for the one with 16 to achieve the possibility of getting the number of votes necessary. It is a little bit of an unfair thing. We're trying to come up with what would be the best option for us. It is best that we decide [in this term of Council] so we don't have a bias moving forward on it."

Should a report come forward on different options the incumbent Council might want to take, Councillor Michael Thompson said he hoped a report would be limited strictly to the matter of how to appoint a Deputy Mayor, as defined under Council's procedural bylaw, rather than opening up the procedural bylaw for a wholesale review.

"I just want to be very clear," he said.

Responded Clerk Michael De Rond: ?I would just bring back options for the next term of Council. Of course, this term of Council could weigh in on it, but it would be what the Deputy Mayor position looks like in a ward system versus an at large system and what the options would be.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter